

## It's Hard To See Much Difference In Shortgrass Bankers' Condition

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MERTZON — At last the skies have cleared over the Shortgrass Country. After 30 or 40 days of wet, dismal wether, the climate is returning to the normal minus-four condition of dehydration.

It nearly waited too long this time. The sheep were hobbling around, drawn as old Mexico buggy horses. The cows were packing the maximum number of horn flies. And to further jeopardize the industry, the saddle horses were snorting and coughing so much that a corral full of these old dirt daubers sounded like the seal division of a large metropolitan zoo and resembled the contents of the hold-over corral at the P&G soap factory.

For once, the livestock were in worse physical shape than their owners. Life at the pickup window or saddlehorn level had never seemed better. What few problem remained were being healed by the abundance of green forage blossoming across the countryside.

The pessimistic element was the first to try to detract from this near-perfect autumn scene. You know the ones I mean — the hombres who invariably see the bad points of drouths, market wrecks and famine.

The cloud had barely disappeared until these prophets of doom began to scream to the high heavens that tight money, growing tighter than a geisha girl's waistband, was going to wreck our future. These gloomy cusses began announcing far and wide that just as soon as the feed trucks started rolling, bankers were going to develop a case of ear colic.

Upon hearing these sad tidings, I decided it was high time to check into what was actually happening in the centers of finance. The following sketchy notes are what I found on adventure into the hallowed portals of bankdom:

I found the livestock bankers to be going in to the winter in better shape than at any other period in modern times. Their flesh condition was rated choice to prime. Pulse beat and blood pressure was static. Even the smooth-mouthed veterans of the Great Drouth (the one in the '50s) were in good enough condition to imitate Tarzan at a minute's notice.

As a general rule, the atmosphere around the banks was favorable, too. In most instance the note pads were stored in their customary bottom desk drawer position. Only in a few isolated cases were these all-important forms stashed under two years' back issues of the Wall Street Journal, or stored in the dark corner of the president's safety box.

By mid-point in the survey I found only two features that lent credence to the forecast that a money squeeze was in progress: The piped-in music was tending more and more toward such mournful ballads as Bury Me Not on the lone Prairie, replacing the catchy waltz that trilled across the lobbies last summer; and a recently-appointed agricultural expert was seen sharpening his pencil with his pocket knife to conserve the power his bank had budgeted for his electric sharpener.

The latter, of course, seems a trifling matter when one recalls how long bankers were forced to make a pencil last during some of our other disasters.

All attempts to obtain a comment from these captains of the purse string regarding the recent jump in interest rates were met by the same silence that an over-enthusiastic imbiber of strong spirits expects from his spouse on New Year's Day. The officer in charge of one institution which the wags call Never Leak National did proclaim that if this new interest figure was going to be the ceiling, he feared his bank was going to be forced to call in its risk capital.

After some prodding, this financier defined risk capital as being short term notes secured by such shaky collateral as gold coins held in escrow, or paper backed by ranches yielding a monthly oil income somewhere in the range of President Johnson's weekly take-home pay.

Before this interview ended (he had been extremely impatient from the moment he noticed the symbol of ranchdom — my run-over boots), he indicated that his bank would welcome ranchers' deposits, at least until the first of the year.

In sum, the survey turned up nothing to show a radical change in the attitude of bankers. As a matter of fact, it was heartening to see these citizens of the world of rubber stamps and interest charts in such a jolly humor. After visiting with them, I firmly believe this land the Arapahoes called the Big Styte is on the verge of a golden era — that is, if the fickle old country ever dries off again.